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UNCLAS YEREVAN 001254

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: RIVAL POLITICAL CAMPS UNITE OVER CHESSBOARD

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

2. (U) The current National Assembly (NA) marked its first anniversary May 26 with a chess tournament featuring international grandmaster Smbat Lputyan who played against 14 MPs and NA staffers. Each party faction, including the opposition Justice bloc, nominated two players for the tournament. Coalition and opposition MPs proudly posed with Lputyan in front of the cameras and seemed more than eager to skip debates over the few draft laws that were on May 26 parliamentary agenda. Eventually NA Speaker Baghdasaryan dragged the players and their numerous fans into the session hall for a quick 5-minute parliamentary vote. In the end, the grandmaster won eleven and played three games to a draw. End Summary.

NA ANNIVERSARY MARKED BY CHESS TOURNAMENT

3. (SBU) The third convocation of the Armenian National Assembly completed its first legislative year on May

26. To mark the anniversary, MP Hranush Hakobian, chairwoman of the Standing Committee on Culture, Education, Youth and Sport, invited international grandmaster Smbat Lputyan for a chess tournament with legislators and parliamentary staffers. Each party faction nominated two MPs and/or staffers for the game; MPs Aram Sargsyan, chairman of Democratic Party, and Viktor Dalakyan represented the opposition Justice bloc. (Note: Although the opposition Justice bloc continues to boycott National Assembly sessions, they were out in force for the exhibition chess tournament. End Note.) MP Ashot Aghababian, who owns the lucrative Hrazdan retail market, donated 30 chessboards to NA for the game. Supporting teams of MPs, visitors, and the media had lots of fun while Lputyan simultaneously played against his 14 opponents.

4. (U) Both the coalition and opposition chess players fully supported each other at the tournament. Throughout the game, numerous chess fans commented irreverently on every move on the board, served generous amounts of coffee to compensate for, as they put it, the "unusual mental overload" for MPs, and vigilantly prevented one of the players from swiping a chess piece as a souvenir. In his turn, head of the governing coalition's Republican faction Galust Sahakian said in an interview that if the opposition won the chess game then they could ask for anything, including a vote of confidence.

5. (SBU) Absorbed by the game, coalition MPs were more than reluctant to get back to their legislative activities and debate a few drafts that were on May 26 parliamentary agenda. NA Speaker Baghdasaryan literally dragged the coalition MPs into the session hall, promising that the vote would take "only five minutes." Meanwhile, opposition MPs Sargsyan and Dalakyan used the continuing opposition parliamentary boycott to their advantage and kept playing. In the end, however, none of the MPs was able to defeat the grandmaster: out of 14 games, Lputyan won 11 outright and played 3 to a draw.

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